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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Is it just me, or do many of you feel that a lot of taxpayers' money ended up being wasted because of the Microsoft antitrust case ruling last week? Here's a company that is found to be guilty of antitrust laws; and they walk away with barely a slap on the wrist! The irony of it all was that this judge lost a bundle because she had to sell her Microsoft stock at a terrific loss or be disqualified due to conflict of interest. Her ruling in this case was unbelievable! Enough about the case, before I get sick!

Election Day has come and gone. Massachusetts actually elected an outsider to the governor's seat - first time in about 20 years! Personally, I'm glad to see it happen. I hope that you all voted, and took advantage of your rights, and privileges, to do so. I finally made sure that I was re-registered as I hadn't done so since we moved a few years ago (shame on me!). As far as I'm concerned, there's no excuse for not voting - even if you feel there's nothing or no one worth voting for. Hey, my dog Butkus almost got a write-in vote against an unopposed candidate that I didn't like. That candidate didn't get my vote, as is my right. Well, enough from that soapbox!

Boy has it been unseasonably cold here in New England! It certainly doesn't feel like early November!! It's supposed to warm up over the weekend, so I'll take advantage of it and clean up as many leaves as I can before they freeze! Oh well, I think it's going to be a long, cold, and snowy winter. I may as well get used to it now for when the real thing comes along!

Until next time...

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Atari ST on PocketPC

STacy and STBook users aren't the only ones with portable STs anymore. CastCE is an emulator that runs ST programs on PocketPC handhelds.

http://www.pocketextreme.ru/phpbb/viewtopic.php?t=311

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I don't really have a lot to say this week, so you can breathe easy.

I would like to mention the elections held this week, but I realize that not everyone who reads this lives in the United States... or even cares about the elections, so I won't. I'll just say that I found the election itself much less interesting than the rhetoric that was thrown about from one end of the country to the other. I think that there ought to be a $10,000.00 fine for each instance of a candidate mentioning their opponent in a political commercial. And just to drive the point home, the money could be donated to the opposing party. <evil grin>

On another subject, people are not only getting dumber and dumber, but also less and less concerned with rules and right and wrong. Laws seem to only apply when they want them to, courtesy is something that everyone else should pay to them but not the other way around, and everyone else is always wrong. I think it's important to realize that you've got no control over how they act, but what's even more important is that you DO have control over how you act. It can be as simple as that... paying attention to how you act. Quaint old phrases like "do unto others" and "walk a mile in my shoes" are quite cliche in this day and age, but they hold true none the less.

Well, let's get on with the news, hints, tips, and info available on the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Petr Stehlik asks about a hack for Sim City:

"Many years ago I heard from someone on NeST that he patched the game SimCity to run in an extended Falcon resolutions (currently it requires ST-Low, i.e. 320x200 in 16 colors, but the game would look way better in say 640x480). The game itself seems to be fully GEM conformance so it should not be impossible to do that.

Doesn't someone of you have the patched version by a chance? Or would someone be willing to look into it?"

Peter Persson tells Petr:

"I've heard of that too, but couldn't find the actual patch anywhere. I tried to patch the game myself, but it I never managed to get it to work. Has anyone else tried this?"

Petr tells Peter:

"I also tried it but as you I couldn’t get it running. It looks like it has a hard-coded screen size somewhere or something alike (perhaps small int arithmetics - 320x200 is < 215 while 640x480 overflows...)

I didn’t really spend much time on it. I just disabled the check for ST-Low.."

Peter takes an interest and asks Petr:

"Did it run at all? Did the screen get garbled up or did run in a small (320x200) window?

I.e does it use clean GEM compatible code or direct screen access?"

Petr replies:

"Hmhmhm, the point is that I don’t want to run it in ST-Low! I want to run it in much larger resolution simply because the game really needs it."

Rob Jenkins asks about Cubase:

"Got a copy of cubase audio, disk and dongle only, no manual.
I’ve found bits of information regarding the differences between audio and cubase 3, but so far nothing on how to record.

I’m using a soundpool FDI, on coax input, and in the hardware setup, I can choose from A/D or FDI L or R and record at 44.1khz, only problem is, I don’t know where to do the recording.

I tried hitting the record button whilst on track one on the arrange page, and I got a warning saying that I couldn’t record to that drive, so I tried all the others (6gig in 8 partitions), but got the same message each time.

Could it just be my drive isn’t fast enough, it’s an IDE, though I do have a SCSI Zip I could try."

Jos van de Gruiter tells Rob:

"Cubase Audio Falcon can only record to an external SCSI hard disk, Zip or Jazz. Although ZIP isn’t fast enough to do 8 tracks (4 are measured). IDE’s just don’t work.

When Steinberg made CAF not all IDE’s were fast enough to do HD recording, SCSI were. So they deliberately ruled out IDE to avoid complaints that CAF wasn’t up to the job.

Try to buy an external SCSI HD from 4 - 6 Gb, they’re not that expensive anymore.

A/D means you can record through the stereo mini-jack microphone input of the Falcon (not really cool), or you can record through the S/PDIF in, that is: when the instrument/ amp/ mixer has an S/PDIF output. Some people record through the digital ins and outs from DAT/Minidisc/ CD players, which is a better option than those damn mini-jacks."

Rob tells Jos:

"Nice one, thanks for all that.

I'll try my Zip drive for now, see how I get on with that.
I don't think I'll ever really get up to 4 tracks of audio, never mind 8, I'm primarily midi (though I realise I could record my midi tracks into cubase for processing.)"

Don Wolfe asks for help with NEWSie:

"My ISP has changed the logon configuration for the news groups. Their looking for my user-name as donw@intergate.com and Newsie sends only what is left of the @ sign.

Is there any work around for this, or is there any way to patch Newsie ??"

Martin Tarenskeen asks Don:

"Have you tried to put "donw@intergate.com" in the NEWsie settings where you probably have "donw" entered as your username or login name now ? I'm just guessing, I haven't been using NEWSie since a long time anymore."

Edward Baiz tells Don:

"I would just switch to Okami like I did. It works much better than Newsie and does not crash at all. Look for an article I wrote about it's setup at the MyAtari site, October issue."

Carey Christenson asks about backing up his Falcon:

"I am looking for a program that can run a AUTOMATIC SCHEDULED BACKUP on my Falcon030?? Any suggestions??? I have a program called Rational Sounds that does have an ALARM feature on it with a COMMAND line but I do not know what to enter in there to get it to backup my partitions to a completely different drive. And all of the DOCS are in some foreign language!! Any help from anyone would be greatly appreciated. Thanks in advance and long live all Atari computers everywhere!"

Edward Baiz tells Carey:

"That would be a nice thing to have, but I would just get one of those programs that would pop up and remind you to make a backup. I usually backup my system every 2-4 weeks and I always have two backups available. You never know when you will backup a faulty system. I have done that and I am sure others have also. If you want to backup to a CD, CDBackup by Anodyne is great. If you backup to floppies, then Diamond Back III is sufficient.

You can check out some ftp sites and see if you can come up with something. I know I have seen Atari programs that can be set to activate in the future."

Martin Myttebier adds:

"Diamond back is good but ONLY when one uses the common 8+3 file system. It fails badly when one use VFAT.

AFAIK, under MiNT on can use cron to run an automatic backup.

There is also a German application called E-backup. This package contains ebatch.acc. With this acc one can run up to 16 program, for instance E-backup at a given time.

AFAIK, E-backup is a commercial program. A few years ago one could get a copy from AG-Computertechnik. If he still sells it I don't know. I'll see him saturday morning. If I don't forget it I'll ask him.

Anyway the program is all German.

Another solution is jobtimer.acc which comes with Kobold (fast-copy program). Jobtimer can execute Kobold jobs (for instance a backup job) at a given time.

Kobold is a commercial program distribute by ASH see:

http://www.application-systems.de/kobold/index.html

It's all German but I believe an English version is available somewhere on the net. For more info see the homepage of DDP:

http://www.cix.co.uk/~derryck/index.htm "

Greg Goodwin adds his thoughts:

"Diamond Back has additional problems. I used to use it to backup 30MB partitions to other 30MB partitions on removable media without trouble. However, when I bought CDISO (from Anodyne) I thought I could use Diamond Back to copy all the files on my little partitions to one big partition. It couldn't, and bombed the system.

I hate to say it, but Diamond Back (& Diamond Edge) are rather dangerous on partitions greater than some size, and I suspect it's 256 MB."

Derryck Croker jumps in and posts:

"One of our members did indeed translate Kobold into English (take a bow, Peter), but I'm afraid that it isn't available for download. TBH I don't know what the fate of the English version was, I'd have thought that Atari Workshop would be the place to ask."

Richard van Vugt asks about what he thinks is a virus:

"I have a mouse that does not respond. It only 'walks' to the left of the screen as the only mouse movement. I can get the mouse pointer at the right spot only with the ALT and arrow keys. At first I thought my mouse was faulty; I got an other one, but the problem did not go away. Is it a virus? And how can I get rid of it?"

Adam Klobukowski tells Richard:

"The keyboard, or more probably the mouse port may be faulty."

David Wade adds:

"You don't say which Atari you have. Almost all the "single box" Ataris, i.e. ST, STFM, STE have the mice ports attached the keyboard purely by solder.

This tends to suffer from metal fatigue and after a while it cracks and you loose contact. This happens if you often swap mouse to joystick etc.

Anyone who is competent with a solder iron should be able to fix..."

Richard tells David:

"Yes I have a 1040STfm. So I'll just have to open up the thing and see what I can do. Is there anything I have to take care of when opening? And how do I open it up?

David replies:

"Its been a long time but the following springs to mind ....

1) You just need to undo the screws in the "square" holes to get the case apart

2) The metal screen is a right bugger to get off.

3) Some keys (space bar and/or return) I think have only one rubber contact cup but have space for two. End result you think you have lost one....

4) You might want to use some epoxy to secure the socket. (but you might not, as if you need to replace it its then harder)

5) When re-fitting be careful not to bend the LED (power? Floppy?) that stick up from the keyboard.

6) Buy an extension cable so it does not happen again.

7) If you are even slightly unsure, or not heat with a soldering Iron. Get someone else to do it."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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Keeper of the Flame
by Thomas J. Andrews
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I bought my first Atari 800 at a garage sale in 1985. Little did I know what I was getting myself into. Oh, I'd been involved with computers before, in college and later when I was drafted into the Army, but that 800 was the first computer that was *mine*.

It was magic. There was much to learn and do. As the cliche goes, the possibilities seemed endless. I remember many late nights spent typing

magazine programs - games mostly, but others, too. My first real word processor, Speedscript, was laboriously typed in over several nights from the pages of Compute! magazine. Public domain and shareware programs abounded.Quality stuff, too. Better than some commercial offerings. Online services like GEnie and Delphi - and let’s not forget the local BBS - opened a whole new world to me.

Then it all began to wane. Commercial software went first, then the magazines, one by one. As more programmers turned to other platforms, PD and shareware dried up. BBS’s shut down and support on the online services became sporadic. Eventually there was nothing new anywhere. The magic, while not dead, was comatose.

It was about this time that I got my ST. Much of the magic was back for a while as I learned about WYSIWYG word processors, desktop publishing, and eventually the Internet. But it was too late for the ST to maintain the magic for long. The parent company was gone, and most programmers had already abandoned it by the time I found it. I could feel the magic slipping away again after just three years.

Then a Windows 98 PC came my way. Once again there were new things to learn. The full power of the Internet was at my disposal. I was introduced to instant messaging, the power of online shopping, the lure of Ebay. I bought a scanner and a color inkjet printer. I finally had a computer "like everybody else’s."

But something was missing. The magic wasn’t there, not like it had been with the ST, and certainly not like the 8-bit. I think it might be because it all seems so impersonal. There are lots of Windows programs, but few people seem to do quality programming for Windows for the sheer joy of doing it, as so many had, and some still do, for the Ataris. Then again, maybe I never felt fully in charge of my own computer. Windows does what Microsoft thinks is best, and it’s just too bad if I don’t agree.

Now, barely a year after getting the Windows PC, I’m trying Linux. Specifically, Mandrake Linux 8.2. There have been a couple of false starts and a few bumps along the way, but things started going fairly well after about a month. It’s a little early yet, but I think it shows promise. The magic may be back.

The part I like best about Linux is the Open Source concept. All of Linux’s internal "secrets" are laid bare for the world to see. If I have sufficient programming skill I can modify the code any way I like, customize it to suit my own quirks. I can even share those modifications, as long as I include the source code, and my modifications can, in turn, be modified.

The BASIC programs from the magazines were like that. I learned a lot about programming from examining those type-ins, and I used some of the routines I saw there in my own programming. My one Antic-published program wouldn’t have worked without a short machine language subroutine I found in an Antic from four years before.

A friend says, "More software is being written for Linux than for any other platform." I believe him. Most of it is free for the downloading, too. Some is available on CDs at minimal cost, like the old PD programs for the 8-bit.

There are some places where Linux is lacking, so I can’t abandon Windows entirely. Scanner support is one. My Visioneer 7600U isn’t supported. At least I haven’t found a driver for it yet. Printer support isn’t all it

could be, either, and Winmodems, modems designed so that Windows takes over part of the functions "regular" modems do internally, are all but impossible to use. On balance, Linux computers are completely immune to the 60,000+ Windows viruses, and because of the nature of the OS it's extremely difficult to make a Linux virus effective. Another plus is Linux's almost legendary stability. Crashes, commonplace with Windows, are much rarer with Linux.

So now I have four computer systems: Atari 8-bit, Mega STE, Windows 98, and Linux. No, make that five. With Spectre GCR, I can make my STE think it's an old Mac. No wonder I'm confused! It's not going to get any better, either. In a few days, Joe Mirando has promised the CDs to install Mandrake Linux 9.0 will be here, and I can update everything. Things are supposed to run faster, bugs have been fixed, features added. Will it work? We'll see...

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Holme's Atari Games
http://homepages.paradise.net.nz/atari/

This New Zealander(note the "nz" in the url) site could be a gold mine for Atari Emulator users. Hundreds of .atr files of Atari programs are here, free for the downloading. The site name is a misnomer, as there are more than just games here. The list of utilities and apps is very extensive, too. One could just go there and roll around in the titles, programs you probably wanted when the 8-bit was in its heyday, but couldn't afford or couldn't find.

I have mixed feelings about this site. Many, if not most, of these programs were once copyrighted, commercial offerings, and they are here now, available for free. The site owner states in several places that the files are offered for those who wish to keep the Atari 8-bit alive, and that if any copyright owner requests a program to be removed, it will be done immediately. Realistically, the 8-bit market being what it is, most of these offerings no longer have much, if any, commercial value. Still, there's the uneasy feeling of piracy in offering these programs to the public without specific permission from the copyright owners. I don't know about New Zealand law, but it seems to me that the absence of objection isn't the same as giving permission. On the other hand, there are SO many programs here that simply are no longer available in another form, except perhaps at garage sales and flea markets. Keeping them around is also important.

I'm bringing this up because these things need to be brought out into the light of day and discussed. If copyright owners would have objections, they need to be notified. Many, I realize, simply don't care anymore. Others would deny their programs to the remaining Atari public just on general principles against piracy in any form, and that's their right. Still others embrace the idea that their creations will live on, even if they are no longer commercially viable.

What do YOU think?

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TJ
Keeper of the Flame
&
Atari Computer Enthusiast of Syracuse

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Acclaims Changes 'BMX XXX'!
Wanna Play Some Football?!
'Fatal Frame'! 'Lord of the Rings"!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Acclaim to Edit Nudity from Version of 'XXX' Game

Acclaim Entertainment Inc. on Monday said its controversial video game "BMX XXX" will not contain topless nudity in the version to be released for Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2 console later this month.

Some of the nation's leading retailers, including Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Toys R Us Inc., have said they will not carry the game because of subject matter that also includes strippers, pimps and coarse language and features the tagline "Keep It Dirty."

In the edited version of the game, players will be unable to create topless female characters for stunt-bike sequences, Acclaim spokesman Alan Lewis told Reuters.

Versions of the game for Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox and Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s GameCube will not be edited, Glen Cove, New York-based Acclaim said.

"BMX XXX" for the PlayStation 2 and Xbox are launching Nov. 15 and for GameCube closer to the end of the month. All three versions had been scheduled for a Nov. 19 launch.

"I would say that the distribution continues to expand," Acclaim Chief Executive Gregory Fischbach told Reuters. "The distribution on it is pretty good."

Fischbach said the game will still have distribution through major specialty game retailers and music and video retail chains.

So far major retailers have not indicated they would roll back on their initial decision not to carry the game, he said. Best Buy Co. Inc. said last month, however, it would consider selling an edited PS2 version.

In reporting its fiscal fourth-quarter results in October, Acclaim said its results for the current quarter might be hurt by limited distribution for the game.

Changes to the game for the edited Sony version were "done with good taste and in humor," like the decision to place the title "BMX XXX" in black lettering over the tops of the previously nude women, Fischbach said.

Fischbach said the game was no more extreme in its use of language, violence or any other adult behavior than Take-Two Interactive Software Inc.’s smash hit "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City," which launched last week and is expected to be the best-selling game of 2002.

Both titles carry "Mature" ratings from the Entertainment Software Rating Board, meaning they are not intended for children under the age of 17.

"The success of ’Vice City’ made everybody kind of pay attention," Fischbach said. "When you kind of look at the two games, there’s a great deal of similarities between them."

Join the Ghost Hunt in ’Fatal Frame’

A good old-fashioned ghost story in its purest form, "Fatal Frame" is a welcome change from the typical horror game where swarms of vampires or other monsters must be obliterated -- usually with huge guns.

Mutants don’t lurk around every corner and the creatures you encounter aren’t always intent on doing you great bodily harm. There are no guns, knives or explosives.

To get rid of the malevolent spirits, you still have to shoot them -- but it’s done with a mystical box camera capable of capturing their tormented souls.

This game relies on a simple premise: a heroine who doesn’t have the sense to bring a search party with her, a supremely spooky score, and a superb sense of tension that makes your pulse race every time you turn a corner.

I only played the beginning of the game and there were a few times I almost jumped out of my seat.

Released earlier this year for the PlayStation 2 and just out for Xbox, "Fatal Frame" ($50, from Tecmo) is the tale of a young woman named Miku searching for her brother in an abandoned mansion in Japan. The siblings share a sixth sense -- the ability to see and "feel" the presence of ghosts.

The brother, who is a writer, ventured into the Himuro mansion after his mentor and an entourage disappeared there a month earlier.

What’s disconcerting about this game is that the ghosts are particularly versatile. Most of the time you can sense them coming. You hear static-like noise. Your hand controller begins to vibrate. A light in the corner of the screen starts to glow.

You need to use those aids to find the ghost, put it squarely in the viewfinder and take its picture. For benign ghosts -- the ones you have to be quick to catch -- a good photograph of them is worth points for upgrading your camera. But some of the ghosts will attack, so you’ve got to be fast with the flash, or they’ll suck the life out of you.

Some spooks appear with no warning at all. And, it’s that uncertainty that keeps you on the edge of your seat.

There are a few annoying things about the game.

Every time you want to save your progress, you must do it twice. In addition to storing your position, you have to separately save the pictures you’ve taken.

There are also some continuity problems. In my first visit to the library, I heard a deep, ominous voice coming from a tape recorder in the closet. I picked up the recorder, but each time I revisited the room, the voice was still there.

Because the Xbox version was not available for review, I don’t know whether these problems have been corrected.

But even on the PS-2, all the quirks are outweighed by the strengths of "Fatal Frame." Sometimes they even enhance the spookiness of the experience.

Some players will be bothered by the system for maneuvering the characters. If you want Miku to move to the left, you must move the thumbstick on the controller to the left. But because the vantage point frequently shifts, as it would in a movie, there’s a tendency to try to point the thumbstick in the wrong direction whenever the scene shifts. As a result, you may find yourself making Miku walk into walls.

The changing camera angles, however, add immeasurably to the creepiness of the game. Having Miku almost go off the screen before you can see where she is adds an extra layer of tension. Most of the time, there’s nothing to be seen. But just when you think you’re safe, another tormented spirit drifts by -- a spirit that may or may not try to kill you.

The developers of "Fatal Frame" say it’s "based on a true story." But when pressed for more information, Tecmo says it’s actually based on two separate Japanese folk tales, and offers no real evidence that the stories are true. Instead, the company talks about weird happenings in an unidentified house where, if you take a picture of a certain window, for instance, the image of a girl is said to appear in the developed photograph.

But don’t let the facts get in the way of your chance to enjoy this game.

Just turn out the lights and be afraid.

"Fatal Frame" is rated for teens.

’Rings’ Does Well As Videogame

The history of videogames is littered with the rubble of bad titles based on popular movies.

But even a blind pig finds an acorn once in a while, and so it is with the subject of today’s tirade, "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers," provided by Electronic Arts and developer Stormfront Studios for the PlayStation 2 (news - web sites).

If you’re awake, you’ll notice the title matches the second episode in the

movie series, which is due to debut in December, although events in the early rounds are based on the first movie, "The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring."

That bit of confusion aside, EA has managed to put together a solid title, especially if you're a fan of the hack-and-slash school of gaming.

Stormfront has done an admirable job of blending clips from the movie with animated cut scenes and then segueing into the parts of the game you control - the battle scenes. It's beautifully done and the transition from movie to game cut scene is seamless.

Playing as either Legolas, Gimli or Aragorn, you must fight through more than a dozen levels. Doing well in battle will earn you points which can be spent to upgrade weapons, unlock new fighting combinations and even interview the film's actors.

Saving comes after you successfully dispatch the level's boss.

The game offers one of the best defensive moves I've seen in a hack-and-slasher, and it is really vital to learn to use it properly, in combination with your various attacks.

When playing as Aragorn, for instance, your main weapon is your sword. But Aragorn also has a bow, which must be used to dispatch some enemies and the end-of-level bosses. So - block the attack, hit a shoulder button to draw the bow and fire, then back to defending until you get another shot. Done right, you take minimal damage and inflict maximum pain on Sauron's flunkies.

Graphics get an A. They are beautifully drawn, shading and detail are excellent, and they reproduce almost perfectly what you see in the movie. Snow scenes will give you shivers, and entering the Mines of Moria is a truly frightening experience. Action is handled well and there's no visible slowdown.

Control gets a B. The controls work well, but there's a lot to do and some chores, like aiming arrows, take a lot of work.

Sound gets an A. The lush score, the voices by many of the real movie actors, the sound effects, all blend perfectly for one of the best aural experiences in gaming.

Give "Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" a B+. It's one of the more entertaining games I've played this year, and whether or not you're a fan of J.R.R. Tolkien's epic tales of hobbits and goblins, you'll love the game.

"Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers" is rated T, for ages 13 and up.

Punt, Pass or Catch These Football Games

At the midway point of the football season, your favorite pro or college team may already be out of the championship hunt, but die-hards can continue the quest by playing some of the hottest football titles for video game systems (all games are rated for all ages):

NFL 2K3

* * * 1/2 (out of four)

(Sega Sports, for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube; $49.99): The NFL 2K franchise enters its third year -- and unlike most expansion teams, it’s a contender. All 32 teams are available, including the new Houston Texans. Every signature stadium is available, along with detailed crowds, players and coaches. Among available game modes is franchise, in which gamers can play more than one season and have total control as both coach and general manager. Players also have the ability to draft college seniors from sister Sega title NCAA College Football 2K3. Notably, Sega Sports has teamed with ESPN for the broadcast presentation, with player introductions, game highlights, replays and scores (though without ESPN’s personalities). You can challenge friends far and near via online play, and keep stats to see how you stack up against others across the country. The graphics are superb, and the artificial intelligence is smart enough to appeal to both veterans and rookies.

NCAA Football 2003

* * * 1/2

(EA Sports, for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube; $29.99-49.99): EA Sports mixes in marching bands, mascots and cheerleaders for that old college atmosphere. Among the new game modes is Rivalry, in which players can fight a school’s chief rival to win not only bragging rights, but one of 23 available rivalry trophies. Once a trophy is won, players can start a collection in the new trophy room. For the first time, players can "create a school" -- not only build a team, but also customize uniforms, stadiums and fight songs, then name their school as they strive to be a national powerhouse. Or they can choose from among all 117 Division 1-A teams, one of 25 new "mascot" teams -- actually made up of team mascots -- or the 2001 All-American team. Signature stadiums, chants and fight songs are available for all schools. The campus challenge, which rewards players with points for accomplishing certain goals (such as rushing for 100 yards during a game), allows players to earn pennants and unlock secret teams and cheats. And the commentary team of ESPN’s Brad Nessler, Lee Corso and Kirk Herbstreit offers insight.

Madden NFL 2003

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(EA Sports, for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube; $39.99-$49.99): Madden, for years the dominant football title, enters its 13th season with a number of new features to keep up with the increasing competition. The playbook editor lets players showcase their coaching skills by creating offensive and defensive plays. But the creativity doesn’t stop there: You also can create a specific player as well as an entire team. Novices may want to take advantage of the new minicamp mode, in which certain tasks must be performed well to successfully advance. It gives newcomers a better grasp of how to pass, run and kick. Madden’s graphics and gameplay are superb. So is the commentary of John Madden and Al Michaels. And the artificial intelligence is rock-solid and challenging.

NCAA College Football 2K3

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(Sega, for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube; $29.99): In its sophomore year, NCAA 2K3 continues to strive to be a top-notch bowl contender. But it has lost a little ground along the way. First-timers may want to start out in practice mode, to work on learning how to maneuver a running back -- using juke moves, stiff arms and spin moves -- or on learning specific plays from the playbook of a team by running them without the interference. NCAA 2K3 offers many of the usual modes, such as exhibition, tournament and legacy (equivalent to dynasty mode elsewhere). But what made NCAA 2K2 a big hit was its solid artificial intelligence. In this year's version, players will notice that the AI has slipped, evident when trying to complete a pass: The defensive back seems impossible to separate from the receiver. Veteran players may learn to overcome this, but it could turn off novices.

NFL Blitz 20-03

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(Midway, for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube; $39.99-$49.99): Midway's hard-hitting, smash-mouth video game offers players a break from simulations by venturing into arcade action. Seasoned players will enjoy such new features as the create-a-player mode; fantasy stadiums are available, such as Arctic Station and Central Park, N.Y., where players can take on zombies. Rosters have been updated to reflect current NFL teams, uniforms and stadiums. But there are eight players on a team, as opposed to the traditional 11. And late hitting and smack talking are encouraged.

NFL GameDay 2003

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(989 Sports, for PlayStation 2; $39.99): Many of GameDay's past must-have features remain, such as 3-D players, stadium models, and arcade and simulation modes of play. But new in this year's version is a third voice on the commentary team: Ian Eagle joins Dick Enberg and Dan Fouts for timely, lively advice. GameDay's newest feature is the ability to play online: Up to four players can face off using two game systems and Sony's $40 Network Adaptors (for Ethernet or phone lines). Gamers will enjoy GameDay's responsiveness; the only knock against the game is that it's just not Madden or NFL 2K3.

NCAA GameBreaker 2003

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(989 Sports, for PlayStation 2; $39.99): Like its competitors, GameBreaker 2003 offers 117 Division I-A schools. But you also can choose from 66 classic teams such as Florida State '93 or USC '79. Choose from four skill modes -- freshman to senior -- and check out the coaching career mode, where coaches can climb the ladder from assistant coach at a small school to head coach at a national contender. Individual awards can be achieved over the course of a season, such as the Heisman, All-American and All-Conference awards. All 27 bowl games are available, with weekly Top 25 rankings. 989 also has thrown in a new two-man commentary team: analyst Tim Brandt and the legendary Keith Jackson. The graphics and gameplay are adequate, though handling the camera angles can be frustrating.

NFL Fever 2003

* *

(Microsoft, for Xbox; $39.99): Microsoft's first football season was spectacular, but this time it hits the sophomore jinx. All of the basic features are here, including the practice, dynasty and challenge modes, and classic teams such as the 1998 Denver Broncos. Game action is extremely fast, giving it more of an arcade, rather than simulation, feel. But the artificial intelligence is not very challenging. It may not be easy to run, but it's too easy to pass, especially deep. And the pass protection gives the quarterback enough time to read a book before he throws the ball.

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ICWhen.com Opens Its Vault to Collectors

ICWhen.com has selected choice items from its vault to auction. Items include rare and one-of-a-kind memorabilia from the video game industry.

Please bookmark this link. New auctions are being posted regularly. If you know someone that may be interested, please pass the link along to them.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Ruling a Boon to Windows

Consumers switching on a Windows computer in coming months could see important new changes, including prominent links for programs such as music

and chat software from some of Microsoft’s biggest corporate rivals.

But a court’s decision not to impose tougher penalties than those negotiated with the Bush administration means Microsoft’s flagship software will remain mostly unadulterated as the engine for the technology industry and for its own extraordinary profits.

U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly approved only minor changes in the settlement. She will permit computer-makers, for at least five years, to activate software from rivals as soon as a new PC is switched on by consumers. She also will prohibit Microsoft from threatening to retaliate against anyone who cooperates with its rivals.

The judge established a corporate committee - consisting of Microsoft board members who are not company employees - to make sure the company lives up to the deal, and she gave herself more oversight authority.

But she would not go further punishing Microsoft, deriding arguments by attorneys general from nine states and the District of Columbia that tougher penalties were essential to restore competition in the technology industry. The judge said many of these additional proposals were developed chiefly to benefit Microsoft’s rivals, not consumers, and said the states’ legal strategy had been hopelessly flawed.

What a difference a judge makes.

Kollar-Kotelly, 59, proved a meticulous, enigmatic jurist unwilling to push the limits of earlier rulings on Microsoft by a federal appeals court.

She adopted a remarkably narrow view of the issues surrounding the case and indicated she was particularly skeptical over the failure to show how Microsoft’s business decisions hurt consumers, even as these actions proved devastating to technology rivals.

She said the states demanding tougher penalties showed "little respect" for those earlier appeals rulings and their arguments were "unjustifiably in conflict" with those same rulings.

The judge in the earlier Microsoft trial, Thomas Penfield Jackson, charged through until he was removed for conducting secret interviews with reporters during the case.

Unlike Kollar-Kotelly, who remained stoic throughout a 32-day hearing earlier this year, Jackson occasionally lost his temper toward witnesses during a 78-day trial and laughed openly at Microsoft chief Bill Gates. Jackson also eagerly broadened the case beyond narrow questions surrounding Internet browser software and frequently butted heads with the appeals court.

When Jackson handed down his punishments, also overturned later by an appeals court, he ordered Microsoft split in two. Friday’s decision by Kollar-Kotelly was far more favorable for the software giant.

Gates pledged a personal commitment to abide by the judge’s instructions, which he called a "a good compromise and good settlement." Microsoft’s lawyers expected to spend the weekend reviewing the decision, which covers hundreds of pages. But he said: "We’re not seeing anything that would be cause for appeal."

Officials for the nine losing states also were studying their options. They

could appeal the judge’s denial of additional penalties, although California’s attorney general, Bill Lockyer, acknowledged that after a four-year court fight, "We’re all fatigued."

His colleague, Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, who has been among Microsoft’s harshest critics, struck a more defiant tone: "The last chapter has not been written," he said.

Although Microsoft’s most prominent court battle seemed headed toward resolution, the company’s antitrust troubles are not over.

It still faces private lawsuits by Sun Microsystems Inc. and AOL-Time Warner Inc., and European antitrust regulators - who were awaiting the U.S. judge’s decision - have hinted they will announce sanctions against Microsoft by year’s end on related matters.

US Says It Won’t Oversee Added Microsoft Sanctions

It will be up to state prosecutors to enforce antitrust sanctions against Microsoft Corp. that go beyond the company’s settlement with the Justice Department, the department’s chief antitrust enforcer said on Thursday.

The department’s antitrust division won’t be responsible for overseeing a handful of additional restrictions that a federal judge added to her landmark antitrust ruling at the behest of some state attorneys general, U.S. antitrust chief Charles James said after a speech on Thursday.

The ruling handed down last week by U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly endorsed Microsoft’s antitrust settlement with the U.S. government and nine states.

In it, Kollar-Kotelly rejected nearly all the demands for stronger sanctions by a group of nine other states seeking tougher sanctions against the company.

At issue are a handful of additions the judge made at the behest of the dissenting states.

For example, the judge banned Microsoft from threatening retaliation against computer makers, whereas the Justice Department settlement banned only retaliation itself. She also imposed additional restrictions on the initial "boot" sequence of the Windows operating system, and reworded part of the settlement to ensure that Microsoft doesn’t stop computer makers from offering customers a wider array of Internet access providers.

James, who is leaving the antitrust division later this month for a job in the private sector, said it will be up to the states to enforce those restrictions.

Making his last speech as antitrust chief, James said the judge’s ruling vindicated his decision to settle the case, despite complaints by Microsoft rivals that it was too weak to prevent Microsoft from abusing its dominant position in the software industry.

James said some competitors and pundits created a political "spectacle" to push for greater restrictions on Microsoft, rather than relying on long-standing antitrust law and the facts of the case.

"You have to ask yourself, ’Do you really want to live in a world where strategies like this are effective?"’ James said. "I certainly don’t want to live in that world."

An appeals court ruling in June 2001 upheld trial court findings that Microsoft had illegally maintained its Windows operating system monopoly, but rejected breaking the company in two.

The settlement was reached among Microsoft, the Justice Department and nine states in November 2001 after Kollar-Kotelly urged the parties to reach an agreement.

It gives computer makers greater freedom to feature rival software on their machines by allowing them to hide some Microsoft icons on the Windows desktop.

Under the settlement, Microsoft is prohibited from retaliating against computer makers who choose to feature non-Microsoft products. Nor could it enter into agreements that require the exclusive support of some Microsoft software.

Windows will be sold under a standard license to the major computer makers, although discounts would still be allowed according to the volume of the order.

The nine states that declined to settle were California, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Utah, West Virginia, plus the District of Columbia.

DOJ, Microsoft Sign Off on Settlement Changes

Attorneys for Microsoft Corp., the U.S. Justice Department and nine states signed off on a handful of changes to their antitrust settlement that were outlined in a landmark federal court ruling last week.

The three sides agreed to make the relatively minor additions sought by U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly, which are designed to ensure that the company does not abuse its dominant position in the software industry.

The parties filed a document with the court on Friday agreeing to the changes.

Kollar Kotelly added the provisions to the settlement at the behest of nine other state attorneys general who refused to sign on to the Justice Department agreement.

The ruling she handed down last week endorsed Microsoft’s antitrust settlement with the U.S. government and the nine settling states.

In it, Kollar-Kotelly rejected nearly all the demands for stronger sanctions by the dissenting states. Attorneys general of those states have not decided yet whether they will appeal the ruling.

Among the handful of changes the judge did make was one that bans Microsoft from threatening retaliation against computer makers, whereas the Justice

Department settlement banned only retaliation itself. She also imposed additional restrictions on the initial "boot" sequence of the Windows operating system, and reworded part of the settlement to ensure that Microsoft doesn't stop computer makers from offering customers a wider array of Internet access providers.

Also on Friday, Microsoft named three members of its board of directors to an "Antitrust Compliance Committee" that will help oversee the settlement.

In her ruling, the judge said the panel should consist of three members of the Microsoft board who are not present or former employees of Microsoft.

The panel will be chaired by James Cash, a professor at Harvard Business School. The other members are Raymond Gilmartin, chairman, president and chief executive officer of Merck & Co. Inc., and former U.S. Labor Secretary Ann McLaughlin Korologos.

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AOL Loses Court Ruling on Internet Privacy Issue

The Virginia Supreme Court ruled against America Online in its efforts to protect the identity of one of its 35 million subscribers by asking the court to quash a subpoena calling for the member's name in an issue that goes to the heart of the anonymity of the Internet.

The ruling against the world's largest Internet service provider, based in Dulles, Virginia, was the latest in the evolution of privacy laws as they pertain to the Internet and identities of Web surfers, privacy experts said.

"The law is very unsettled and still being written. Any decision by the highest court of any state -- particularly the one where AOL resides -- is significant," said David Sobel, general counsel at Electronic Privacy Information Center.

The Virginia Supreme Court sided with a lower California court's ruling that supported Nam Tai Electronics Inc.'s request to subpoena the identity

of an AOL user as part of a complaint that alleged libel, trade libel and violations of California's unfair business practice statutes.

The electronics company alleged in its complaint, filed in January 2001 in California Superior Court, that 51 unknown individuals, including an AOL subscriber, posted "false, defamatory and otherwise unlawful messages" about the company's stock on an Internet message board.

"The case is important to the extent that AOL was attempting to ask the Virginia Supreme Court to adopt a rule of law for Internet speech that was different than the law as it exists for the bricks and mortar world," Jon Talotta, associate at Kirkpatrick & Lockhart, which represents Nam Tai, told Reuters.

"This ruling makes this a traditional defamation case," added Robert Feyder, litigation partner at the law firm.

In April 2001, AOL filed a motion to quash Nam Tai's subpoena. arguing it should not be required to reveal subscriber information because it would "infringe on the well-established First Amendment right to speak anonymously."

AOL, the Internet arm of media giant AOL Time Warner Inc., also argued Nam Tai could not meet the heightened scrutiny required to overcome that right but the lower California court denied AOL's motion.

Companies, including AOL, have turned over subscriber's names under different circumstances, an AOL spokesman said.

However, AOL argued that Nam Tai's complain did not merit setting aside First Amendment rights, but the lower California court denied AOL's motion to quash the subpoena.

"Clearly, we are disappointed in the ruling. AOL feels that there are important critical First Amendment issues at stake in this case and we are in the process of considering our legal actions," AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham told Reuters.

The online giant has 10 days to ask the Virginia Supreme Court to reconsider its decision or turn over the name. If AOL goes back to the court in Virginia and it still rules against AOL, the company could then appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Privacy experts called the ruling significant but said more litigation involving online privacy issues would likely unfold before a determination is made about what a company needs to prove before winning such cases.

"It is disappointing because a whole host of courts around the country have been appropriately concerned about the First Amendment right to anonymity," said John Morris, staff counsel at the Center for Democracy and Technology.

However, he said, the decision may not have as much importance in the end because the Virginia Supreme Court ultimately decided that the First Amendment issues surrounding this case must be resolved in the California courts where Nam Tai filed its original complaint, Morris added.

College Copyright Cops Are Privacy Risk, Group Says

A civil-liberties group asked colleges and universities on Wednesday to refrain from monitoring students' Internet use, even if administrators believe that students may be swapping copyrighted songs or movies.

Students may feel intimidated if administrators monitor Web browsing to make sure they are not swapping Eminem songs or episodes of "The Sopranos," the Electronic Privacy Information Center said in a letter sent to 50 schools.

"Monitoring chills behavior, and can squelch creativity that must thrive in educational settings," EPIC said.

Record labels and movie studios asked college administrators last month to crack down on student file-swapping, which they see as a threat to CD and movie-ticket sales. Several education groups echoed the request in a letter of their own.

Many college campuses are wired with high-speed Internet access that allows digital video and audio to be downloaded quickly. Few homes in the United States are so sophisticated.

As campus networks have sagged under the increased traffic, some schools have moved to block the peer-to-peer networks like Kazaa and Grokster that make file-swapping possible.

In its letter, EPIC acknowledged that schools should manage their bandwidth efficiently, but said that student privacy could be violated if network administrators comb through personal e-mails and Web-surfing logs to ferret out bootleg Britney Spears songs.

"Such a level of monitoring is not only impracticable; it is incompatible with intellectual freedom," the letter said.

The president of the Recording Industry Association of America, which has aggressively fought online file trading, issued a curt response.

"I don't think anyone needs to lecture universities about academic freedoms and respecting the First Amendment or privacy rights of their students," said RIAA President Cary Sherman.

FBI Finds Source of Internet Attacks

The distributed denial of service attacks against 13 of the Internet's core servers has been traced to computers in the U.S. and Korea, according to statements made by U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation director Robert Mueller.

The FBI director, who made the statements while speaking at a conference in Falls Church, Virginia, would not elaborate on what information his agency has obtained, saying that the investigation was ongoing.

"I can't give you a brief on where the investigation has led us," Mueller said, according to a transcript of his comments provided by the FBI.

The attack, which began on October 21, flooded all 13 of the root servers

of the Internet Domain Name System, a network of computer servers that communicate by matching up Internet domains used by people with numeric equivalents used by computers.

All 13 of the root servers were flooded with Internet traffic using ICMP (Internet Control Message Protocol) at more than 10 times the normal rate of traffic, said Brian O'Shaughnessy, a spokesperson at VeriSign after the DDOS attack happened. VeriSign manages the "A" and "J" root servers.

Roughly two thirds of those servers were temporarily disabled or severely hampered in serving legitimate user requests by the attack, according to O'Shaugnessy and others. However, four or five of the 13 servers remained online throughout the attack and the majority of Internet users did not experience any interruption in service.

South Korea, along with the U.S. is a frequent source of cyberattacks because of the large number of computer users in that country and the widespread availability of broadband Internet access such as a DSL or cable modems.

Unlike machines that connect to the Internet using dial-up modems, machines with broadband connections maintain a constant, high-capacity connection to the Internet when they are turned on. As a result, attackers, viruses, and e-mail worms can compromise these computers often without the knowledge of the computer's owner. Those machines then act as "zombies" in a distributed denial of service attack, controlled remotely by the attacker and used to send a steady stream of information packets to the targeted Web site or server.

Allan Paller of the nonprofit SANS Institute said Friday that investigators may be able to use billing logs from the Internet service providers involved to trace the attacks back to their source.

However, Paller noted that lists of machines that are known to have been compromised by hackers or worms such as Code Red and Nimda are frequently traded on the Internet. Investigations into the source of the October 21 attack will likely lead back to those compromised machines in the U.S., Korea and elsewhere.

From there, the job of identifying the actual perpetrators gets more difficult.

The fact that computers in Korea took part in the attack does not mean that the attackers were Korean, Paller said. Attackers frequently compromise and control such machines from afar using one or more intermediate machines to cover their tracks.

Mueller did not say whether any progress had been made in locating the actual perpetrators behind the attack and an FBI spokesperson would not comment on whether the agency is close to identifying the individuals responsible for the DNS attacks.

Symantec Anti-Spam Tools Working Too Hard

Symantec has fixed a flaw in part of its Norton Internet Security 2003 security software suite that can cause e-mail to be deleted before it reaches a user's inbox, Symantec said Friday.

Users had complained that Norton Internet Security 2003 was deleting e-mail. For such e-mail, all that appeared in the inbox was a message with "Symantec Email Proxy Deleted Message" in the subject line, said Katherine James, a Symantec spokesperson in the U.K.

"We had a small number of users of Norton Internet Security 2003 who reported that the product was inadvertently deleting e-mails," said Jones, adding that the first report came in on October 14. Symantec issued a software patch to fix the flaw earlier this week.

The flaw lies in the antispam part of Norton Internet Security 2003, an Internet security suite that includes antivirus, firewall, privacy control, spam alert, and parental control software. The antispam feature is meant to flag any suspected spam, unwanted commercial e-mail, coming in to an inbox.

"If a user was running the computer continuously and was receiving a large volume of e-mail, or they had configured their e-mail client to check the mail server frequently, the Norton Spam Alert could cause memory allocation errors, which could cause the e-mail deletion," said James.

Symantec believes only a small number of users have actually been affected by the flaw because of the small number of complaints. The Cupertino, California, company, however, won't say how many customers complained or where those customers were located. Norton Internet Security 2003 is sold around the world.

Norton Internet Security 2003 users can download a patch that fixes the memory allocation error through the application's online update feature, James said.

Notre Dame Math Whiz Cracks Certicom Code Contest

And you thought you had tough math homework?

Consider the work that went into cracking a secret code developed by Toronto-based Certicom Corp., which makes wireless encryption software.

It took the power of 10,000 computers running around the clock for 549 days, coupled with the brain power of a mathematician at Indiana's University of Notre Dame, to complete one of the world's largest single math computations.

Certicom had challenged scientists, mathematicians, cryptographers and hackers to try to break one of the encryption codes the firm uses to protect digital data.

The solution, rewarded with a $10,000 prize and even richer bragging rights, was reached at 12:56 p.m. on Oct. 15, said Notre Dame researcher and teacher Chris Monico.

"I stared at it in mild disbelief for a while," he said. "I wanted desperately to jump up and down, but the mathematician in me said 'You'd better double check'."

Monico's pleasure at breaking the code was matched by the contest's creator and Certicom founder, Scott Vanstone.

"Our technology is based on a very hard mathematical problem, so what we wanted to do is validate how difficult it really is," he told Reuters.

"When somebody asks have hackers attempted to break your system, we say of course, we in fact encourage it. Please go try. And here's the results."

Vanstone points out the massive computer power used to crack the code in this challenge would have broken the Enigma code, a cipher used by Germany during World War II, in a matter of seconds.

The solution, he added, gave access to just one person's key, or identity, and cracked only a 109-bit key, whereas Certicom's products start at a 163-bit key to protect data.

"It would be about 100 million times harder (to break) than what was just done," Vanstone said. "If you could get every machine on the planet working on the problem...you're still not going to be able to touch the 163 problem."

Monico said he doesn't have time to tackle the next 131-bit key challenge, which has a $20,000 prize, but did share his computer program with a "motley crew" of half a dozen "computer guys."

The Certicom challenge, started in 1997, has attracted 247 teams with more than 10,000 members, including cryptographers, computer scientists and mathematicians.

Monico, who took up the challenge to "raise awareness of cryptography," will donate the bulk of his prize money to the Free Software Foundation and the remaining $2,000 to two men whose computers helped solve the problem.

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